



THE MILLIONAIRE GIRL

Or the Parmenter Millions

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By ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT,
Author of "By Right of Sword," "When I Was Czar," Etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Olive Parmenter, heiress to Gregory Parmenter's millions, is engaged to the future Lord Belborough of Oxfordshire. Her father, after receiving a mysterious cablegram from America, insists that the marriage be hastened. No objection is made, but Lady Belborough takes occasion to insult the girl and is rebuked by her husband, Lord Belborough. The wedding is attempted, but the bridegroom is found dead from the shock, and it is later discovered that he has been stolen, thus leaving Olive penniless. The woman in black sustains her claim to be the widow of Gregory Parmenter, and with her son, Gilbert Merriwell, takes possession of the Gregory estate. Merriwell calls on Parmenter's old lawyer, Mr. Casement, who suspects Merriwell of having stolen the will. Olive writes to her lover saying that they must not meet again; but he secures an interview in Mr. Casement's office, in which he vainly urges her to marry him in spite of all. Finally she agrees to come to him when the mystery is cleared up, and starts on a journey of investigation. On the train she is attacked and robbed by a man disguised as a woman, and only by a ruse prevents him from throwing her out of her compartment. The police and railroad officials discredit her story, and when about to be taken to prison Mrs. Merriwell interposes as a friend of hers. Here Olive is kept prisoner, denied the privilege of communicating with friends, and finally sent to an asylum. Her lover, Jack Belborough, arrives just in time to see her at the station and rescues her from the young physician who is taking her to the asylum. She next goes to London, and there by accident learns to know Selma Hammond, an intimate acquaintance of Gilbert Merriwell, who loves to be a member of a noted band of crooks. Olive lays plans to get into the secrets of the band.

CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.

Olive returned home in love with her new project. The prospect of something definite to do was indescribably welcome after the period of enforced and frequent hopeless idleness. She had been hungering for occupation. She ignored the risk to be run. She would not think seriously of it. She must be prepared to face dangers if they were necessary. The present conditions of her life were impossible. They were wearing out her mind. The repetition of such a scene as that with Lady Belborough was too horrible to contemplate. She must either win her fight with the Merriwells or run away from it all.

All thought of marrying Jack until her name was cleared was dead. Her mother's cry of warning poisoning enemies had killed it as effectively as even Mrs. Tainton could have wished. Never, never, never, till her dying day would she forget them, never cease to shrink at the stab and ache of the wounds, never fail to feel the flush of shame that had mantled her cheek in her degradation.

Yet life without her lover and without the hope of being his wife held nothing but barrenness for her. If she could not clear her name, then death itself would be preferable. She could, therefore, laugh at the idea, which might deter any one who had less stupendous reasons and motives.

She had now, moreover, a further motive than the righting of her own wrongs. If Selma Hammond had not been misled, her lover himself was in danger, and the unmaking of Gilbert Merriwell was the only way to save him. Jack's interests as in her own. And even if her own reasons had not been so driving, the thought of his danger would have sufficed to induce her to face even greater risks.

Before she finally adopted the plan, however, she carefully considered whether the safer one of taking Inspector Robson into her confidence would be as effective. A whisper to him that Gilbert Merriwell was Gideon Mawford would be enough to cause his arrest. But would it help her own end to unravel the mystery, of that old marriage fraud?

The answer was on the surface. She must so contrive as to get Merriwell into her power. It must be a personal victory. She herself must be in a position which would enable her to face him with the power to punish him in her hands alone and to give him the alternative of either telling the truth, his imprisonment merely would not help her. It was in her grip, not in that of the law only, that he must be caught.

As for a purpose than that it was which she had formed, and then a thought occurred to her that gave her immense satisfaction. She had come up to London as at the bidding of an impulse and with no definite aim. But now she seemed to see why that impulse had been sent to direct her movements, and in her simple fashion she fell on her knees and returned thanks to Providence for that direction.

In the same light she regarded her present impulse—to face the risks attendant upon the course she had chosen, and with firm courage and devout earnestness she set about her preparations.

through the part. She recalled also all she had heard Selma herself say, and being an excellent mimic and having a splendid memory, her study was soon fruitful.

At the same time she read a number of German books to freshen up her ready intimate knowledge of that language; and seeking out a German governess she passed several hours of each of the days while she was waiting to hear from Selma in conversation in German.

There were two other matters to decide. She must have a plausible story of her life, in case questions were asked; and she must look the part she had to play. These were both easy enough, but they cost much time and thought.

She must be so disguised that even Gilbert Merriwell should meet him, in fact, she hoped, would be unable to recognize her. The actual costume was soon fixed. Any dress would do, so long as it was unlike anything she had ever worn; and was plain and common. Her figure, too, could be altered. Padded would give her large, round hips, fill out her bust, and increase the width of her shoulders, and when she had completed this part of her scheme, a few touches here and there, coupled with a heavy, awkward walk, effected a change which she was confident would carry her through successfully.

The alterations in her face were more difficult, and all the more so because she would have at times to resume her ordinary appearance. On this account she had a wig made which was the exact counterpart of her own hair, and as soon as that was ready she had her own hair dyed and cut almost short. It was naturally curly, and thus the tongs soon gave her a mass of little flaxen curls, which her dyed eyebrows and lashes converted into an almost typical German face. A pair of slightly tinted pince-nez completed the disguise.

She had found it impossible to carry on this work from Mr. Robson's house, and accordingly had taken a room elsewhere, under the pretext that she was a female private detective; a statement which allowed of her freely entering the house as Olive Parmenter and going out as Rosa Baumstein, the name she intended to assume.

Jack had meanwhile been sent to Paris, and was away some ten days; and in all that time no news came from Selma. Olive had indeed been glad of the time to complete her arrangements, although the absence of news began to worry her. Three more days passed; and then, concluding that Selma had been prevented from communicating, Olive resolved not to wait longer, but to go to the Hartmanns on her own account.

She believed that Gilbert Merriwell had taken Selma out of London, having possibly heard of their last meeting. It called for extra courage to act alone; but Olive was very confident of her disguise, and without fear for herself.

She was anxious to get at close grips with Merriwell, and she had just told the Robsons that she would be away for a few days, when to her astonishment, Gilbert Merriwell himself was shown into her room.

"You are surprised to see me, Miss Parmenter, but I wish to see you on account of a young woman in whom I am interested, and who has told an extraordinary story about you. Selma Hammond."

"What did he know?" In her first indignation she was about to order him to leave the room; but feeling it would be safer to hear him, she pointed to a chair and herself sat down to listen.

CHAPTER XIX.
"Rosa Baumstein."

Olive's first thought, when Gilbert Merriwell spoke of Selma Hammond, was that the girl had returned all that had been told to her, but in a second she discarded it as being not only unworthy of Selma but false to her own implicit belief in her sincerity.

"I wish to warn you against that girl, Miss Parmenter," said Merriwell, after a pause, "she is thoroughly bad and has been in prison."

"And your reason?" asked Olive curiously.

"I know you will scarcely believe it—a desire for your good."

"As you anticipate, I do not believe it. What is this alleged story?"

It was soon apparent then that she had very little to tell, and had come rather to seek information than to give any.

"You went to her lodgings?"

"What is the story you say she has told?" interrupted Olive. "I saw her accused unjustly of picking a pocket in Oxford Street, and was able to give her from a false prosecution. That is no secret. Now, what has she said?"

"She is a convicted thief, Miss Parmenter, and served a term of imprisonment in Chicago, and she is also the associate of thieves on this side."

"But the alleged story? What has she said of me?"

"She declares that you were with her for some hours; that you spoke of myself and my mother to her in terms of excited abuse; that you questioned her closely about us, saying that you believed we were soundless and had plotted to rob you; and that, in short, had mastered enough to carry her

rogues, and attempted to get her to help you."

He spoke somewhat hesitatingly, weighing his words and searching Olive's face as if for confirmation of the tale, as he told it. Olive saw at once that he was lying, and read his motive. He wished to find out what Selma had actually said to her. It was clear that if Selma had really betrayed her she would have revealed all about the Hartmanns and the plan the two had discussed together.

"Where is she?" asked Olive in reply.

"Where she can do no more harm," said Merriwell without thinking.

"Then why do you think it necessary to warn me?"

"No, Mr. Merriwell. Your interests, not mine, have brought you here today. You have made a great mistake—surprising in one so shrewd. You have told me that there is some connection between you and this girl whom you describe as a convicted thief. I had an instinct that that was so. Now I know it."

He shrugged his shoulders as if portance and waved his hand to dismiss the subject. "As you will. But I had another object in coming to see you."

"But I wish to state it; I wish to discuss it with you. I give you my word of honor, Miss Parmenter, that I feel intense sympathy with you in all the trouble that has befallen you. The present straits to which you are driven, through absolutely no fault of your own, are painful and distressing to both my mother and myself. We wish to have an opportunity of showing this practically."

"I have had abundant evidence of your friendly intentions," said Olive. He took no notice of the interup-

tion. "It is true that the law has given us this immense fortune; but we feel that at the same time it has done you an injustice so intense as to render your position extremely invidious. You have always taken the ugliest view of my own actions and intentions toward you; but you must allow me to remind you that after you had refused to honor me with your hand it was my mother's wish, no less than my own, that you should share the fortune with us."

Olive maintained a resolute silence, and when he paused allowed no sign of her feelings to escape her, either in word or look.

"I would ask you once more, Miss Parmenter, to make me the happiest and proudest of men by consenting to be my wife."

A rapid glance and a gesture of the hand answered him.

"I would devote my life to your happiness," he cried earnestly, bending his dark eyes upon her. "I love you more for the heroism with which you have borne this reverse of fortune, and my heart is yours."

"It is impossible," she broke in sharply.

"As you will," he said with a sigh. "That is, however, my great desire. But if not that, then will you not consent to take a part—a half, if you will—of the fortune, and put an end to all the strife between us?"

When she did not answer he assumed that she was impressed by the offer, and went on to urge her acceptance of it.

"I have been thinking," she interrupted, breaking into one of his flowing sentences. "You offer me (this is a bribe to acquiesce in the shame you have put on me. And I reject it as an insult. Mr. Merriwell. But you want to compromise. All the money my father left is mine by right, and you and your mother know this. Well, tell the truth—admit that that story about the Sheffield marriage is false—

a public admission, of course, I mean—and I will give you one-third of the whole inheritance and undertake that no steps shall be taken to punish you for the wrong you have done."

Merriwell's set face paled, his eyes glittered dangerously, and his nostrils dilated as his breath came quickly in rage at this defiance. It cost him a great effort of will to control himself. "That, of course, is an insult," he said. "I came out of no feeling, but kindness to you."

"Nonsense," retorted Olive, with an angry smile. "You came to see if you could make terms with me by which you could keep at least half of what you have stolen. You came because you are afraid that I shall find out the truth. You thought that having had a little experience of this reverse of fortune, I should be in the mood to come to terms. Well, you have failed; and now be good enough to relieve me of the insult of your presence; and with that she rose and pointed to the door.

But he kept his seat and recovered his temper. "This is not a matter that can be adjusted by temper shown on either side, Miss Parmenter."

"Will you go?" she cried.

"I beg you—"

As he was speaking the door was opened from without and Jack entered.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, in surprise at seeing Merriwell with Olive.

Merriwell was not in the least disconcerted. "I came to make Miss Parmenter an offer which I should like to repeat in your presence, Mr. Fenwick," he said.

"He first asked me to marry him. Jack, and then offered me a sum of hush money to agree in the wrong he has done me. I have ordered him to leave the room, and he has refused to go."

"Then it's my turn!" said Jack very quietly. "Now, sir, are you going?"

"I wish to discuss—"

"Are you going? I shan't ask you again."

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absent from town she would be spared the difficulty she had foreseen in meeting him.

He had only a very short time to spend with her, and they parted with an assurance from her that she would write him every day. As soon as he was gone, Olive told Mrs. Robson that she was going into the country, and started for her other rooms to assume her disguise and set out on her mission to the Hartmanns.

Merriwell's visit had distinctly encouraged her. She was certain she had read his motive rightly—that his anxiety to come to an arrangement was caused by a consciousness of crime, and that he did not feel secure without Olive's acquiescence in some settlement. He was the last man in the world to part with a single sovereign unless forced by fear of losing all.

His wish to marry her sprang from the same motive. If she were once to raise any questions, "The millions were either hers or the Merriwells; and if she were his wife, they would be secure of everything. Olive saw all this as clearly as if Merriwell himself had told her.

She was fully alive, too, to the hazard of this fresh undertaking. However, she was sure that Selma had not betrayed her. Merriwell had merely been guessing at what he imagined might have passed between the two; and had come to find out all he could to confirm his guess. It was just a bluff in the language of her new slang. And she was high-spirited, hopeful and confident as she made her preparations and assumed the disguise in which she was to play the spy.

She laughed in great satisfaction as she surveyed herself in the glass. Her figure was clumsy, her walk ungainly, and her carriage purposely awkward, but she had been careful not to make her face ugly. She knew too well the effects of good looks upon the average man, and she might need to have recourse to this weapon.

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"It is impossible," she broke in sharply.

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